DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 324 959 FL 018 945

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TITLE Students' Perceptions of Their Past English Study at Kansas University's Applied English Center.
PUB DATE Nov 88
NOTE 77p.; Requirement for a master's degree, University of Kansas.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses - Master Theses (042)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Class Activities; *English (Second Language); Feedback; Graduate Surveys; Higher Education; Individualized Instruction; *Intensive Language Courses; Interviews; *Participant Satisfaction; Personality Traits; Program Evaluation; Program Length; Reading Instruction; *Student Attitudes; Student Evaluation of Teacher Performance; *Teacher Characteristics; Teacher Effectiveness; Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS *University of Kansas

ABSTRACT

This study investigated former students' perceptions of their past studies at the University of Kansas' Applied English Center (AEC). Sixty-one former AEC full-time students who had proven English proficiency since 1983 were interviewed using a questionnaire with 25 open-ended questions. The interviews focused on general program satisfaction, specific skill area classes, general class activities, effective English teachers, and present academic use of English. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed for content analysis. Comparisons were drawn between groups, based on length of time spent in required English study at the AEC and length of time since proving proficiency, on responses to four questions dealing with general program satisfaction. Results showed a majority of students to be satisfied with their English study. Students saw communicative classroom activities and curriculum individualization as useful. Personality factors and providing feedback were found characteristic of effective teachers. Writing was perceived as the most difficult class, and the most important skill area in academic classes. Reading was seen as least interesting. Continued emphasis on interactive activities and course individualization, reevaluation of the reading curriculum, and establishment of a systematic AEC graduate feedback system are recommended. (Author/MSE)

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STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR PAST ENGLISH STUDY AT KANSAS UNIVERSITY'S APPLIED ENGLISH CENTER

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

X

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STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR PAST ENGLISH STUDY
AT KANSAS UNIVERSITY'S APPLIED ENGLISH CENTER

by

Barbara Gottschalk
B.S., University of Nebraska, 1974

Submitted to the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and the Faculty of the School of Education of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education.

Professor in Charge

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November, 1988

ABSTRACT

This study was done to determine how former English students at Kansas University's Applied English Center perceive their past English study at the AEC. It was an institution-specific version of a previous study done by Christison and Krahnke (1986) of 80 graduates of 12 different intensive English programs in the U. S. In this research, 61 former full-time AEC students who had proved English proficiency during the period since 1983 were personally interviewed using a survey instrument with 25 open-ended questions. Topics included general program satisfaction, specific skill area classes, general class activities, effective English teachers, and the students' present use of English in their regular academic classes. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed for content analysis. Comparisons were drawn on responses to four questions dealing with general program satisfaction between groups based on length of time spent in required study at the AEC and length of time since proving proficiency. Results of the study showed a majority of the students were satisfied with their past English study and in general, length of time in the AEC and length of time since proving proficiency made no significant differences in students' responses. Students saw communicative classroom activities and individualization of a course's curriculum as useful. Personality factors and providing feedback were found to be characteristics of effective teachers. Writing was perceived as the most difficult class as well as the most important skill in academic classes. Reading was seen as the least interesting class. Continued emphasis on interactive class activities and individualization of course content, a reevaluation of the reading curriculum, and the establishment of a systematic AEC alumni feedback system are recommended.

Acknowledgments

The author wishes to thank her advisor, Dr. George Hughes, as well as Dr. Larry Havlicek and Dr. Thomas Erb, for their willingness to serve on her thesis advisory committee. Their advice and suggestions were helpful and appreciated. A thank you also goes to Mrs. Elizabeth Soppelsa, director of the Applied English Center, for her feedback and interest in this research. The author is also grateful to her family and friends for their continued support and encouragement. Finally, this thesis is dedicated with a special thank you to the 61 former AEC students who willingly took the time and trouble to participate in this study. Without their interest and cooperation this research would have been impossible.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

According to the Institute of International Education (1988, p. vi) there were 343,777 foreign students from 187 different countries studying in the United States in 1987. Out of this total, 1,730 foreign students were enrolled at the University of Kansas (KU) in the fall, 1987 semester (University of Kansas, 1987). In 1981 KU ranked 35th among American higher education institutions in total number of foreign students, up from 39th in 1986 (Zikopoulus, 1986, p. 61 and 1987, p. 62). Administrators at KU claim that although they don't actively recruit foreign students, as many universities do, they are flooded with applications from foreign students every year. KU is included on many foreign governments' lists of recommended U.S. universities, and it has had a record of international involvement with foreign students since the beginning of the century (Mehra, 1981). Because of the weaker dollar, enrollment officials at KU expect even more foreign students to be able to afford to study at KU in the future (Sodamann, 1988).

The Applied English Center (AEC), one of the oldest intensive English programs in the country, was established at KU in 1964 to better serve the needs of these increasing numbers of foreign students (Truitt, 1981). It is a unit in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and is responsible for "screening all non-native speakers of English in the student body and providing English instruction and orientation to American academic practices to students who need these services" (University of Kansas, 1983, p. 7). It is one of an increasing number (57 in 1964, 398 in 1984) of intensive English programs in the U.S. (Driscoll, 1984).

In the fall, 1987 semester, 433 students were enrolled at the AEC as either full-time or part-time English students. Comparing this figure to the total foreign

student population at KU for the same semester shows about 25% of KU's foreign students were taking courses at the AEC. According to AEC enrollment records, another 29% of the foreign students in the fall, 1987 semester were past "graduates" of the AEC--students who had taken English courses on a full-time and/or part-time basis and had proved proficiency by achieving passing grades on the AEC's proficiency test. These regular KU students plus the students enrolled in AEC coursework comprised 54% of the foreign student population at KU during the fall, 1987 semester. Clearly then, AEC practices, policies, and instruction affect (or have affected) a majority of KU's foreign students.

Background of the Problem

Several research studies have been done that have dealt with AEC students. Hargadine (1981) surveyed current intermediate and advanced level AEC students concerning their orientation needs when they first enrolled in the AEC. Her study showed that students were concerned with improving their English language skills, ranking "ability to speak well" as their most difficult adjustment problem, but only three of the 70 items in her questionnaire specifically concerned English, and none of the items asked for students' opinions of their English study. Her study also only dealt with current, not former, AEC students.

Chan (1981) surveyed Far East foreign students at KU concerning areas of experience they perceived as stressful. She found them to perceive academic areas as stressful. Four of the six academic area items in her questionnaire addressed English skills in particular, so it would seem from Chan's study that English is a stressful area for foreign students at KU, at least for students from the Far East. This study, however, dealt only with Far East students, and it did not deal exclusively with foreign students who were not enrolled in the AEC. We have no way of knowing whether her respondents were past or present AEC students so Chan's study, like

Hargadine's, does not provide a comprehensive picture of how former English students feel about their English study after they have proved proficiency.

Harris (1987) studied former AEC students who had proved proficiency comparing their grades in two required undergraduate English department courses with the English course grades of those foreign students whose scores on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) had been high enough (570 or above) to avoid taking courses at the AEC in the first place. This study suggested that even after proving proficiency, English may continue to be an area of concern for former AEC students. No personal contact, however, was made with these former AEC students concerning their views of their English study in the past.

Purpose of the Study

At the AEC, there is no documented information about past students' opinions of their language study once they have proved proficiency and are enrolled full-time in KU courses. Past articles in KU's student newspaper, The University Daily Kansan, have suggested that at least some vocal former AEC students have been less than satisfied with their English instruction, even with the benefit of hindsight. Complaints cited in various articles ("AEC Director," 1981; Crabtree, 1984; Muller, 1982; Sexton, 1984) were poor instructors, irrelevant course content, and proficiency standards that were "too high." Popular wisdom among staff members at the AEC has been that students may complain while taking their required AEC English courses, but once they are in regular KU classes they will realize the necessity of high English proficiency standards and required English study. Popular wisdom has also been that the number of complaints is directly proportional to the number of semesters spent in required English study. This wisdom, however, has been mainly based on scattered hearsay from former students and conjecture. Although former AEC director, Dr. Michael Henderson, called for

the creation of an AEC alumni feedback system to determine the effectiveness of the AEC's programs as long ago as 1976 (Hauber & Uyeki, 1976), an overall system failed to materialize.

The present research aimed to fill a feedback need by identifying former full-time AEC students who were presently full-time KU students. One-third of this total population was personally interviewed. Interview questions concerned students' attitudes and opinions about their past English classes at the AEC as well as how they used English in their present academic classes. Interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed. Students' responses were counted and categorized and the results were reported in percentages of the total number of responses. The information collected helped to answer the following questions:

1) What are the perceptions of former AEC students concerning their past English study at KU?
2) Do these perceptions differ with respect to the number of terms spent in required English study at the AEC?
3) Do these perceptions differ with respect to the number of terms spent in regular KU classes since proving proficiency?

Definition of Terms

"Former full-time AEC students" were defined as those current KU students who had been enrolled in AEC courses in the past for at least 12 hours credit during one semester or 6 hours credit during one summer term and had not been enrolled in academic courses for credit for at least one term. "Current KU students" were defined as those appearing on the roster of foreign students prepared by KU's Office of Foreign Student Services every semester. "Full-time AEC study" was defined as above, with a "term" being defined as either a semester or an eight-week summer session. "Part-time AEC study" was defined as enrollment in three or fewer AEC

courses in a semester or one AEC course in a summer term and at least one academic class for credit. Students were counted as part-time students until they had proved proficiency on all parts of the AEC's proficiency test and were not required to take AEC classes.

"Number of required terms of English study" was defined as the number of terms a student was required to take part-time and full-time AEC English courses. "Number of terms spent in regular KU classes since proving proficiency" was defined as the number of terms of only academic classes beginning with the first term after proving proficiency and continuing through the fall, 1987 term.

"Perceptions" were defined as the students' responses to each of the interview questions after they had been categorized and ranked according to percentages of the total number of responses for each question. Four of the interview questions were analyzed for significance using the chi-square test of statistical significance. Comparisons were based on the number of terms students had spent in required English study at the AEC and on the number of terms spent in regular KU classes since proving proficiency. These four questions were chosen because they measured students' general feelings of satisfaction with their overall English program.

Limitations of the Study

Any study that deals with foreign students begins by definition with at least one limitation, the great difference among foreign students themselves. A study such as this one which dealt with students' attitudes can be even more culture-bound. The factors that make one student's class "most interesting" may be exactly the same factors that make the same class "least interesting" for another student. A random sample of sufficient size (one third of the total population) was used in this study, but it should be noted that the results reflect overall trends, and that they cannot account for individual variations in students' opinions.

Asking students questions about their past English study in English may have introduced an element of bias into this study. To reduce this, only students who had passed the AEC proficiency test were interviewed, and subjects were allowed to read a copy of the questions as well as listen to them during the interview. Clarification was made when a student requested it or when an answer showed that the student had obviously misunderstood the question. Virtually every student asked for clarification at one point or another in the interview, which points out one main disadvantage of questionnaire surveys--the possibility of questions being misunderstood or responses being made incorrectly.

Another limitation of this study was that only one interviewer was used. Possible bias was kept to a minimum by using a standard interview form so that all the students were asked the same questions in the same way. Students may have also hesitated to give frank answers in a face-to-face interview situation. This limitation was reduced by identifying students' remarks only by a number and having each student sign an interview consent form assuring them of their anonymity. The interviewer was identified only as a graduate student of education. No affiliation with the AEC was mentioned during the interview, and none of the students had had the interviewer as a teacher.

Categorizing the data from open-ended interview questions may have introduced an element of subjectivity into the results. This was balanced by the fact that open-ended questions allowed the students to explain their answers, explore shades of meaning, and come up with original responses without having to fit answers into pre-set categories, as in mailed questionnaire surveys. Similarly, Mackay (1978) has pointed out that with interviews (unlike questionnaires) all questions receive responses, misunderstandings can be cleared up, and unforeseen avenues of questioning can be followed.

This survey dealt only with students' views of their English study at KU because time spent studying English previously was a variable that was impossible to control. Although the expressed topic of the interviews was the students' English study at the AEC, experiences with English study before coming to KU and/or experiences with required English department courses after AEC study may have influenced subjects' answers. It should also be noted that this study's population included only those former AEC students who had remained at KU. The results of this study may have been influenced because former AEC students who had dropped out before proving proficiency and/or who had transferred to other schools were not interviewed.

Because this study was specific to KU and to former AEC students, the results should not be perceived as representative of all foreign students studying at universities in the United States or even of all foreign students at KU. Conclusions from this study and recommendations based on these conclusions should therefore be carefully considered.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The body of research on foreign students in general is rather extensive. Marion (1986, p. 66), in his review of research on foreign students, tells us that "the recent increase in the number of foreign students in the United States has been accompanied by a number of research projects that have been conducted since the early 1950's." His research review alone listed 204 references; many other works consulted for the present study also had similar lengthy reference lists. In this chapter studies will be reviewed concerning foreign students' attitudes and opinions about English and English-as-a-second-language (ESL) study, ESL students' views of English, and foreign students' patterns of English use in their academic classes as seen by both the students themselves and university faculty members.

Research on Foreign Students' Attitudes about English Ability

Research has almost universally found foreign students to be concerned about their English ability. Cadieux and Wehrly (1986) cited a survey showing foreign students ranking English as their biggest problem. They concluded that "Ability to speak the language is by far the most prevailing concern that international students have about their educational experience in the U.S." (1986, p. 52). Foreign students surveyed at the University of Maryland--College Park were also concerned about their speaking ability as well as their writing ability (Carter and Sedlacek, 1986). In Hull's study (1978) 60 foreign students from three different universities were interviewed three times during a year. Students in these interviews stressed the importance of English for academic success as well as for successful interaction with Americans. Surdam and Collins (1984), in a

combination interview and questionnaire study, also found foreign students' perceived ability in English to be crucial to their successful adaption to living in the U.S.

Foreign students in other English-speaking countries also feel English skills are important. In a qualitative research study using unstructured interviews, structured interviews, and observations, Heikinheimo and Shute (1986) found that foreign students surveyed at a Canadian university viewed language skills to be a principal area requiring adaptation and adjustment. The authors concluded that sound language skills were important for social as well as academic adaptation.

Research on ESL Students' Perceptions of their English Instruction

All of the previous studies mentioned dealt with how foreign students in general felt about English. Other studies have focused on present or former English-as-a-second-language students and their attitudes and opinions.

Reid (1987) studied the learning style preferences of foreign students in high intermediate and advanced-level ESL classes in 39 different university-affiliated intensive English language programs. The results of the questionnaires showed that ESL students strongly preferred kinesthetic and tactile learning styles. Another interesting finding was that "virtually none of the respondents chose group learning as a major learning preference" and "many of those respondents indicated that group learning was a negative style" (Reid, 1987, p. 98). Reexamination of teaching methods and ESL curricula was suggested.

Ostler (1980) surveyed advanced ESL students who were taking ESL classes part-time and regular academic classes part-time. Her questionnaire asked students about the academic skills they felt they needed to successfully complete their studies and how well students felt they were able to use their English skills. She reminded all would-be ESL needs assessors that just because students claim an English skill is

useful or used often in academic classes does not necessarily mean that they are not proficient in that skill. A major finding of this study was that students felt they were not as proficient in conversational skills as the people running their ESL programs had felt they were. Also, students seemed to feel the need for more individualization; i.e. teaching more specific academic skills, teaching more major-related skills, and differentiating more between the academic needs of graduate and undergraduate students. Ostler concluded that needs assessments of this sort are not only useful, but necessary for ESL programs.

Bassano (1985) surveyed students in ESL classes through questionnaires concerning their attitudes and expectations about their classes. She also surveyed the students' ESL teachers through questionnaires and interviews and compared the results. It was found that students differed significantly from their teachers in the amount of formality desired in the classroom (students preferred more), in the value of group work (students saw it as less valuable than their teachers saw it), and in the degree to which language skills should be perfected (students wanted more perfection than teachers). Bassano asked two questions pertinent to the present study in her conclusions: "Do students sometimes know better than teachers what it is that helps them learn a language? ... Should students be consulted about their preferences, expectations, and needs?" (p. 90). She recommended that teachers become aware of their students' assumptions about language learning through surveys or discussions.

Christison and Krahnke (1986) interviewed former English students of 12 different intensive English programs about their perceptions of their past English study as well as their patterns of language use in their academic classes. Students were generally satisfied with their English programs, but desired more interactive instruction. Personality qualities of English teachers were seen as more important than technical qualities. Students also indicated that they used the receptive skills of reading and listening more in their academic classes than the productive skills of

speaking and writing. This study also concluded that English students can be valuable sources of information.

Research on Patterns of English Use in Academic Classes

Many different studies have addressed the question of what skills a foreign student needs most to meet the demands of regular academic coursework. In Hull's study (1978, p. 35), students rated speaking in the classroom as their most unsatisfactory skill. This was not to say that students used speaking the most, but that they felt a deficiency in this area caused problems for them in American classrooms where teachers often grade on classroom participation. Students surveyed at the University of Georgia (White, Brown, & Suddick, 1984), on the other hand, felt writing caused them the most difficulty in their academic classes.

Robertson (1982) surveyed foreign students at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign concerning their patterns of language use and found their use of various skills differed significantly across academic disciplines and academic levels. Similarly, in their article on professionally oriented ESL, Huckin and Olsen (1984, p. 274) claimed that many foreign students, especially those in fields such as engineering or mathematics, are not fully proficient in speaking or writing because in their major they do not need to be. English skill needs being specific to a student's field of study has also been pointed out in the TOEFL Test and Score Manual (1987, p. 16) which states that "An applicant's field of study can affect the kind and level of language proficiency that is appropriate." This difference in English needs has been further supported by a study of foreign students at Santa Ana College, (Slark & Bateman, 1981) which concluded that level of English ability did "not seem to be a barrier to success" (p.5) in classes such as basic chemistry, math, and music, whereas greater proficiency in English correlated with greater success in classes such as sociology or anthropology.

Several studies have been done concerning what English skills faculty members perceive as most important in the classes they teach. Johns (1981) surveyed faculty at San Diego State University and found that the receptive skills of reading and listening were considered most important by faculty members. TOEFL conducted a survey (Bridgeman & Carlson, 1983) of faculty members from 34 U.S. and Canadian universities to determine what writing skills they felt were needed by beginning graduate and undergraduate students. "Although writing skill was rated as important to success in graduate training, it was consistently rated as even more important to success after graduation" (p. 55). Huckin and Olsen (1984) also pointed out the necessity of on-the-job English proficiency in their research on the need for more professionally-oriented ESL instruction. TOEFL conducted another survey (Powers, 1985) of university faculty members' views of necessary listening skills. In this study, "reading was consistently rated as the most important for academic success in each of the six disciplines considered in the study" (p. 12). Reading was followed, in order of importance, by listening, writing, and then speaking. Faculty members across all disciplines viewed reading and listening as important while the importance of writing and speaking varied more from discipline to discipline.

Summary

A review of the literature shows that there have been numerous studies done on foreign students, most of which at least touched on foreign students' attitudes about English in general. English was seen by foreign students as being important in helping them meet their social and academic goals. The line between how a foreign student uses English the most in his regular academic classes and what English skill causes him the most difficulty seems rather murky. Faculty surveys of necessary English skills also yielded varying results, often depending on the discipline or academic level taught.

Surveys of present and former ESL students' opinions are few. Students in general seemed to want more individualization and interaction in their ESL programs. An exception was Reid's study (1987) showing group learning as a negative preference. Bassano (1985), Ostler (1980), and Christison and Krahnke (1986) all called for more surveys of students' opinions and ideas about their ESL instruction. Graham (1987) also called for more institution-specific research on limited English-speaking students in reference to setting institutional English proficiency standards. In his article on the evaluation of intensive English programs, Saltzer (1982) pointed out "One must not downgrade the perceptiveness of the international student in academic concerns in the ESL classroom...." (p. 96). The need for involving students in research concerning ESL programs, then, seems clear. Marion (1986, p. 72) also has called for more efforts to be made to replicate previous studies on foreign students and to do more longitudinal studies.

While not strictly a longitudinal study or a replication of a previous study, the present survey of former AEC students at KU concerning their attitudes and opinions about their past English study will fill the need for more institution-specific research on foreign students. It will also fill the need for more student involvement in the evaluation of programs designed for them.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Questionnaire

The survey form used in this study closely approximated the one used in the Christison and Krahnke study (1986). This was because first, most of the questions were good ones and asked for the type of information this researcher was seeking. Second, although close comparisons with the Christison and Krahnke (C. & K.) study could not be validly drawn (and in fact, were not part of any of this study's main questions for research), any differences found between this study's results and the C. & K. study's results might provide some interesting insights and useful discussion.

The C. & K. study used the personal information questions shown in Table I.

TABLE I

PERSONAL INFORMATION QUESTIONS

Name _____

Native language _____

Age _____ Sex: M_____ F _____

School attending _____

Major_____

Graduate _____ Undergraduate _____

Time in U. S. _____

Time studying English: _____

In U.S. _____ Overall _____

This study substituted each students' name with an assigned interview number to assure anonymity. The age question was dropped because it was not relevant to the study, and to this researcher, it seemed a rather blunt question to ask of an interviewee in a face-to-face situation. The question about which school the interviewee was attending was also dropped because it was not necessary in this KU-focused study. As Christison and Krahnke themselves pointed out in their research (1986, pp. 65-66), the responses to their question about amount of time spent in language study overall showed that "language study previous to study in the U.S. varied greatly and was not regarded as significant in that the subject of investigation was attitudes toward intensive study in the U.S." This question, therefore, was dropped because the subject of this investigation was attitudes toward intensive study at KU. For this same reason, the amount of time spent studying English in the U.S. was not requested either. In an earlier pilot study with the questionnaire it was found that students often did not remember very accurately how long they had studied English at KU. More accurate information about each student's length of English study was found in past AEC enrollment records. It was not necessary, then, to include this question in the interview.

The questions from the C. & K. study about English program concerns are shown in Table II.

TABLE II

ENGLISH PROGRAM QUESTIONS

1.	Do you feel that your English skills improved as a result of your English program in the U.S.?
2.	How could you have improved faster?
3.	If you could have dropped a class from your ESL program, what would you have dropped?
4.	If you could have added a class to your ESL program, what would you have added?
5.	Would you have made any other changes?
6.	Do you feel your ESL program helped you meet your academic needs?
7.	Do you have good feelings about your language program?
8.	Do you feel your ESL program helped you meet your social/practical needs in the U.S.?
9.	Would you have studied English longer or for a shorter time, or was the length of your study about right?

The changes in these questions for the present study began with deleting "in the U.S." from question 1 and adding "at KU." The term "ESL" was difficult for students in the pilot study to understand so it was dropped from all the questions in which it appeared and "English" was substituted instead. In question 6 the phrase "for full-time study at KU" was added to clarify the question. Question 8 was completely omitted. Students in the pilot study found it difficult to understand and

by the time it had been explained, too many alternatives had been presented, and students had been led into answers.

Questions from the C. & K. study concerning classes and language skill areas are shown in Table III.

TABLE III

ENGLISH CLASS AND SKILL AREA QUESTIONS

1.	Which was your most difficult ESL class? Why?
2.	Which was your easiest class? Why?
3.	Which was your most interesting class? Why?
4.	Which class was least interesting? Why?
5.	What activities did you prefer to do in your ESL classes?
6.	What activities do you feel contributed most to your improvement in English?
7.	What activities do you feel contributed least to your improvement?

Again, in these questions "English" was substituted for "ESL" for greater clarity for the students. Question 5 was omitted because in the pilot study the answers were quite similar to those of question 6. For the sake of clarity and brevity, then, question 5 was left out in favor of the question asking about activities which helped the student learn faster and better. For this study question 6 was rewritten in this way: "What kinds of things did you do in English class that helped you improve?" This was because students in the pilot study had had difficulty understanding what was meant by "activities" and "contributed most to your

improvement." Question 7 was changed similarly, substituting "kinds of things," for "activities" and "were a waste of time" for "contributed least to your improvement."

Listed in Table IV are questions from the C. & K. survey about the use of English in academic classes.

TABLE IV

ENGLISH USE QUESTIONS

1.	In what ways do you use English the most for your academic classes?
2.	What are the most difficult things for you to do in your academic classes?
3.	In what ways do you use English the most away from school?

These questions were mostly used "as is" except that in question 1 "coursework" was substituted for "classes." This was to make the interviewees understand that the question was addressing how they used English both in and out of class.

The last section of the C. & K. survey form dealt with teachers (see Table V).

TABLE V

LANGUAGE TEACHER QUESTIONS

1.	Did you have a favorite teacher in your English program?
2.	If "yes," what did that teacher do to make you feel that way?
3.	Do you think teachers in your ESL program knew what English you would need in your academic classes?

In their study, Christison & Krahnke made the point that favorite meant effective (1986, p. 70). In an earlier pilot study for this research, this was not so certain; in fact, several students made a distinction between favorite teacher and best teacher. This study was concerned with finding out what students felt made an effective teacher. That is why the questions in this part of the survey form were completely rewritten. In question 1 "favorite" was changed to "helped you learn the most" and in question 2 "make you feel that way" was changed to "help you learn." These were the only questions in which rewording changed the focus of the questions significantly from those of the C. & K. study. Question 3 was dropped mainly because it seemed ambiguous and its intent was addressed in other questions.

A section of questions from the C. & K. study about out-of-class English experiences was omitted from this study's questionnaire, mainly because the focus of this research was on English classes and use of English in academic classes. During the earlier pilot study students also invariably described out-of-class experiences when they were answering the question about how they could have improved faster. Eliminating this section of questions also kept the interviews to a manageable length, about thirty minutes in most cases.

Permission to use the interview questions from the C. & K. study was granted by the senior author, Mary Ann Christison. A copy of the final interview form adapted for use in this study appears in Appendix C.

Selection of Subjects

The author obtained a list of foreign students enrolled at KU during the fall, 1987 semester from KU's Office of Foreign Student Services. A check of the old AEC files and a computer records search yielded the student number totals shown in Table VI.

Table VI

FALL, 1987 FOREIGN STUDENT ENROLLMENT

Present AEC students (part-time and full-time)	433
Past full-time AEC students who have proved proficiency and are now KU students	225
Past part-time AEC students who have proved proficiency and are now KU students	276
Foreign students who have had no AEC coursework	796
Fall, 1987 semester foreign student total	1,730

Figures indicate number of students

Former part-time only AEC students averaged a total of 1.7 terms of English study before proving proficiency. (Summer school counted as a term, the same as a semester.) Former full-time AEC students averaged a total of 3.2 terms of English study before proving proficiency.

Of the 501 students who had taken coursework at the AEC, only students who had started their English study since 1983 were considered for this research. This was done to limit the focus of the study as well as to ensure that students' AEC experiences were recent enough to be remembered. (Students who had begun their English study as long ago as 1978 were on KU's foreign student roster.) Also, 1983 was the first full year in which the AEC was housed in its present location in Lippincott Hall under its present director, Elizabeth Soppelsa. Limiting this study to students who had begun their English study since 1983 ensured that all the students interviewed had gone through basically the same kind of English program as the present one.

Another way this study's population was limited was by considering only former full-time AEC students. This was done to ensure that the students interviewed had been through an actual intensive (full-time) English program at the AEC for at least one term. (Many of the former part-time AEC students had only taken a few English courses at the beginning of their study at KU, even while they had been taking regular KU courses. This is not a full-time intensive English program.)

With these previously-mentioned limitations in mind, fresh graduates of the AEC were added to the prospective pool of students after the fall, 1987 AEC final proficiency tests. Counting the new graduates, this came to a total of 196 former full-time AEC students who had begun their English study at KU since 1983. A stratified random sample of one-third of this total population was taken based on the year a student had begun his English study at KU. This came to a total of 63 students. An introductory letter describing the research study and requesting a personal 30-minute interview was sent to each of these 63 students. (A copy of the letter appears in Appendix A.) The letter was then followed up by a personal telephone call to each subject for the purpose of requesting an interview and arranging a mutually

convenient time and place, if permission was granted. Only two of the 63 subjects refused to be interviewed, a 97% response rate.

Data Collection

The interviews were held in January and February of 1988. Most of them took place in the daytime and early evening hours, but appointment times ranged from 9:30 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. Interviews were held in dormitories, subjects' apartments, classroom buildings, the Kansas Union, and Watkins Library. All subjects were asked to sign interview consent forms assuring their anonymity and informing them that their interviews would be tape-recorded and then later transcribed for analysis. (A copy of the interview consent form appears in Appendix B.) Although the writer, as sole interviewer, was a graduate teaching assistant at the AEC at the time of the interviews, she did not mention this affiliation until after each interview. Since the author had only been an education graduate student at KU since January, 1987, none of the subjects interviewed had been in her beginning and intermediate level English classes.

During the interview six demographic-type personal questions and 19 open-ended opinion questions were asked concerning the subject's past English study at the AEC and his present use of English in academic classes. A copy of the written interview questions was provided for each subject to use as needed. Some respondents carefully read each question to themselves as the interviewer asked it while other subjects did not look at the question sheet at all, preferring instead to listen face-to-face as the interviewer asked each question. Subjects were allowed to respond at length to each question and some freely used the opportunity. Follow-up questions were asked if a subject's response seemed vague. Many times questions had to be clarified for the interviewees, and the writer often restated the subject's response to check for accuracy. Care was taken to avoid presenting the subjects with

alternative answers to open-ended questions, except when subjects requested clarification.

Survey Sample Characteristics

This study's sample was slightly more heavily represented by males than the total KU foreign student population; 72% as compared to 65% (see Table VII). It was also significantly more undergraduate than KU's total foreign student population; 75% of this study's subjects were undergraduate students as compared to 50% undergraduate students in the total population.

TABLE VII

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF SURVEY SAMPLE

Undergraduate students	46 (75%)	Males	44 (72%)
Graduate students	15 (25%)	Females	17 (28%)

n = 61

The 61 subjects interviewed had averaged three years of time spent in the United States with some students having been in the U.S. for as short a time as one year and one student having spent seven years in the U.S. The average length of total time that the subjects had spent in AEC courses was almost the same as the length of time for all former full-time English students at KU -- 3.1 terms for this study's random sample as compared to 3.2 terms for the total former full-time AEC student population at KU. The number of terms of AEC study ranged from one to eight terms.

As shown in Table VIII the students in this sample closely approximated the percentages of KU's total foreign student population in terms of nationalities by continental breakdown. They represented 13 different language groups (see Table

DX). Arabic speakers were the most numerous, comprising 20% of the total sample. The students in this research sample were majoring in 21 different disciplines with all of the engineering majors together making up the largest single group, 31% of the total (see Table X).

TABLE VIII

NATIONAL ORIGIN COMPARISON

Continental Area	KU Foreign Student Population n=1,730	This Study's Sample n=61
Near East-South Asia	20	28
Far East	50	56
American Republics	14	11
Europe	12	3
Africa	4	2

Figures are percentages

TABLE IX

NATIVE LANGUAGES OF SURVEY SAMPLE

Arabic	12	Thai	3
Indonesian	8	Cantonese	3
Chinese	8	French	2
Spanish	7	Bengali	1
Korean	6	Japanese	1
Persian	5	German	1
Malay	4		

Figures indicate number of students $n = 61$

TABLE X

ACADEMIC MAJORS OF SURVEY SAMPLE

Engineering	19	Business	4
Computer science	8	Social sciences	4
Art & Design	6	Pharmacy	3
Economics	5	Miscellaneous	8
Architecture	4		

Figures indicate number of students $n = 61$

Analysis of Data

After the interviews were transcribed, the scripts were read and the students' responses were categorized. Frequency of each response as well as multiple responses from each subject were noted. For example, if a subject gave the answers "Reading and writing" to the question "In what ways do you use English the most for your academic classes?," each of those responses was recorded. Strength of responses was also noted. For example, in response to the question about whether the student's English ability had improved as a result of his English study at KU, an answer of "Oh yes, definitely" was categorized differently from "Yes, but not 100%" or "A little." Similarly, if subjects could not answer a question or did not want to respond, then no response was recorded. This is why the number of responses for each answer varies.

In a letter to this writer (November, 1987), Dr. Christison, the senior author of the 1986 study that this research was using as a model, cautioned about the tabulation of data from open-ended interviews. She said that it takes time for categories to emerge mainly because of the volume and variety of responses one gets from open-ended interviews. She believes strongly in the validity of the interview technique, however; otherwise, subjects' responses are limited, and the questions as well as the whole intent of the research can be changed. As this study's interview transcripts were read and frequencies of responses were counted, general categories began to emerge. Responses were then grouped into these larger categories, and results were reported in terms of percentages of the total number of responses for each question. Responses that made up fewer than 5% of the total number of responses for a question were grouped together under a "Miscellaneous" category.

The students interviewed were divided into two groups according to the number of full-time and/or part-time semesters they had studied at the AEC. Twenty students had studied one or two semesters at the AEC and 41 students had

studied at the AEC for more than two semesters. Answers to four of the interview questions were statistically compared using the chi-square test for significant differences between the answers of the two groups. The same statistical comparison was done after the students' responses were divided into two groups based on how long ago they had proved proficiency. Twenty-nine students had begun their first semester of full-time KU study in 1987 or 1988 after proving proficiency, while 32 students had begun their full-time KU study in 1986 or earlier.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Presentation of Results

In this chapter results of the interview study are reported. Because of the open-ended question format, many of the responses varied widely. This explains the large percentage of "miscellaneous" answers as well as the large number of response categories for some questions, too.

Table XI shows that the former AEC students in this study (80%) certainly felt that their English skills improved as a result of their study at KU. There were no significant differences when their answers were compared based on length of AEC study and length of time since proving proficiency. Students who gave "partly" types of answers (15% of the responses) claimed that not all of their English skill improvement came from their English courses. They felt some of their improvement stemmed from their own personal study and/or inevitable improvement caused by being immersed in an English-speaking environment.

TABLE XI

ENGLISH SKILL IMPROVEMENT A

Question: Do you feel your English skills improved as a result of your English study at KU?

	Yes	Partly	No
Total population (n=61)	80	15	5
Students who had studied at the AEC for 1 or 2 terms (n=20)	80	15	5
Students who had studied at the AEC more than 2 terms (n=41)	80	15	5
Students who began KU classes full-time in 1987-88 (n=29)	79	14	7
Students who began KU classes full-time before 1987 (n=32)	81	16	3

Figures are percentages

Almost half of the students' responses to the question concerning how they could have improved faster mentioned talking more with native speakers, having English-speaking roommates, etc. (See Table XII). Listening to the radio and watching TV were often given as good ways to improve English skills when native speakers were not available. "Studying harder" (14%) and "doing more outside reading" (10%) might seem to be quite similar categories, but actually the former was a more general answer while the latter meant doing more reading on one's own, reading texts in addition to English class texts, and doing reading related to one's major.

TABLE XII

ENGLISH SKILL IMPROVEMENT B

Question: How could you have improved faster?	
More contact with native speakers	44
Watch TV and listen to the radio	15
Study harder	14
Do more outside reading	10
Take academic courses sooner	6
Miscellaneous	6
Couldn't have improved any faster	6
Figures are percentages	n=93 responses

As shown in Table XIII, speaking/understanding ranked highest (41%) as the class students would have liked to have dropped from their English programs. This was followed by structure class with 25% and reading class with 18%. Most of the reasons for dropping speaking/understanding class had to do with the fact that students can get lots of practice speaking outside of class by talking to native speakers and they can get individual listening practice by listening to television or radio programs. Students who would have dropped their structure class usually said that they had studied English structure extensively in their home countries. An interesting point to note concerning classes to be dropped is that 13% of the responses were "none"; that is, the students said they felt that all of their classes had been useful and necessary.

TABLE XIII

ENGLISH PROGRAM CHANGES A

Class to Drop n=68		Class to Add n=65	
Speaking/Understanding	41	Writing	42
Structure	25	Speaking/Communication	25
Reading	18	None	17
None	13	Structure	8
Miscellaneous	3	Literature-related course	5
		Miscellaneous	3

Figures are percentages n=number of responses

Writing ranked highest as the class students would have liked to have added to their English programs (see Table XIII). This was followed by a speaking or communication class with 25% and the response "None" with 17%. Students felt they would have added a writing class to their English programs mainly because writing was such a difficult skill for them to master and writing is so important in regular KU classes. Students who chose to add a speaking class were usually talking about issue-oriented conversation groups or communications classes that would stress learning how to speak effectively. Students who responded "none" felt that their English programs had been complete just as they were.

The responses to the question "Would you have made any other changes in your program of study?" were quite varied which explains why the "Miscellaneous" category accounted for over one-fourth (27%) of the responses (see Table XIV).

TABLE XIV

ENGLISH PROGRAM CHANGES B

Question: Would you have made any other changes in your program of study?

Proficiency exam-related responses	33
Miscellaneous	27
No	26
Need better teachers	7
Want to take KU courses sooner	7

Figures are percentages n=72 responses

Proficiency test-related responses accounted for one-third (33%) of the answers. The individual responses varied widely; for example, students wanted the chance to take the proficiency test more often, they wanted more "flexible standards" in connection with passing cut-off scores on the exam, they wanted to be tested more on what they had learned in their classes or have course content more closely related to the proficiency exam, they wanted to be able to see their mistakes on their old exams, they did not want to have to retake a section of the test they had already passed, etc. One theme all of these responses seemed to have in common, however, was that of students desiring more control over test situations and desiring more options in which to demonstrate their proficiency. In contrast to the top two

categories which were murky at best, over one-fourth (26%) of the responses showed that students would not have made any other changes in their program of English study, other than the classes to be added or dropped that had been discussed earlier in the interview.

Table XV shows students' responses concerning whether they felt their English program had helped them meet their academic needs for full-time study at KU.

TABLE XV

ENGLISH PROGRAM SATISFACTION

Question: Do you feel your English program helped you meet your academic needs for full-time study at KU?

	Yes	Partly	No
Total population (n=61)	61	16	23
Students who had studied at the AEC for 1 or 2 terms (n=20)	55	15	30
Students who had studied at the AEC more than 2 terms (n=41)	63	17	20
Students who began KU classes full-time in 1987-1988 (n=29)	48	21	21
Students who began KU classes full-time before 1987 (n=32)	72	12	16

Figures are percentages

Sixty-one percent of the responses were "yes," 16% were "partly" and 23% were "no" for the total population. There were no significant differences in students'

responses based on the number of terms they had studied at the AEC. Likewise, there were no significant differences in the answers based on how long ago the students had proved proficiency.

Results from the question which asked the students whether they had good feelings about their English program are shown in Table XVI.

TABLE XVI

FEELINGS ABOUT ENGLISH PROGRAM

Question: Do you have good feelings about your English program?

	Yes	Partly	No
Total population (n=61)	72	7	21
Students who had studied 1 or 2 terms at the AEC (n=20)	80	5	15
Students who had studied more than 2 terms at the AEC (n=41)	68	8	24
Students who began KU classes full-time in 1987-88 (n=29)	72	7	21
Students who began KU classes full-time before 1987 (n=32)	72	6	22

Figures are percentages

Seventy-two percent, or nearly three-fourths, of the responses to this question were "yes" with 21% of the answers being "no" and 7% being "OK," partial-types of answers. No significant differences were found between groups of students when they were compared based on length of AEC study. It was made clear to the students that this question was in the present tense; i.e. "Do ... [now]?" Some

students responding "yes" said that their answer would have been less positive if they had been describing their feelings during or immediately after their AEC study. In spite of these comments, however, no significant differences were found in students' responses to this question based on how long ago they had finished their required AEC study. The percentage results in both groups were almost identical.

Table XVII shows students in the total population were about evenly divided between feeling they should have studied English for a shorter time at the AEC (44% of the responses) and feeling that they had studied about the right length of time (41% of the responses). Students who felt they should have studied English longer made up the remaining 15% of the responses. When compared on the basis of time spent studying at the AEC there was a significant difference at the .05 level between the responses of students who had studied only one or two terms at the AEC and the responses of students who had studied more than two terms. Students who had spent more time in AEC courses felt they should have studied for a shorter time while students who had spent only one or two terms at the AEC were significantly more satisfied with their length of English study. There were no significant differences between the groups based on length of time since proving proficiency.

TABLE XVII

DESIRED LENGTH OF ENGLISH STUDY

Question: Would you have studied English longer or for a shorter time, or was the length of your study about right?

	Shorter	About Right	Longer
Total population (n=61)	44	41	15
Students who had studied 1 or 2 terms at the AEC (n=20)	30	65	5
Students who had studied more than 2 terms at the AEC (n=41)	51	29	20
Students who began KU classes full-time in 1987-88 (n=29)	48	35	17
Students who began KU classes full-time before 1987-88 (n=32)	41	47	12

Figures are percentages

Writing appeared in nearly two-thirds (65%) of the responses to the question about the most difficult class (see Table XVIII). Reading accounted for 21% of the remaining responses. Students who chose writing as their most difficult class stressed how writing involves all the skills at once and how difficult it was to stop translating everything in their heads before writing. Reading was chosen as difficult mainly because of so much new vocabulary.

TABLE XVIII

SKILL AREA PREFERENCES

	Most difficult class n=63	Easiest class n=67	Most interesting class n=68	Least interesting class n=62
Speaking/understanding	6	40	34	21
Structure	--	43	24	13
Writing	65	6	19	19
Reading	21	8	--	35
Miscellaneous	8	3	14	--
None	--	--	9	10

Figures are percentages n=number of responses

Reponses to which class was easiest were almost equally divided between structure (43%) and speaking/understanding (40%) (see Table XVIII). Students chose both of these classes as easiest for the same previously-mentioned reasons they would have dropped them from their English programs.

Responses to most interesting and least interesting classes were more evenly spread throughout several categories (see Table XVIII). Speaking/understanding ranked highest as most interesting class, followed by structure (24%) and writing (19%). The percentage results for the least interesting class were almost the same, with only the skill areas changed. Reading was first with 35% of the responses, then speaking/understanding with 21% and writing with 19%. Good teachers seemed to be one of the broadest reasons for choosing any of the classes as most interesting, regardless of the skill area. On the other hand, bad teachers and lack of variety

seemed to be the two main reasons for choosing a particular class as least interesting.

TABLE XIX

HELPFUL ENGLISH CLASS ACTIVITIES

Talking, speeches, conversation	41
In-class writing, journals	11
Timed readings, using newspapers and magazines	10
Watching videos and videotaping	10
Asking questions, getting correction from the teacher	7

Figures are percentages n=93 responses

Answers that involved active interaction with others accounted for the biggest share (41%) of the responses to the question concerning helpful class activities (see Table XIX). The other four categories evenly shared the remaining 59% of the responses with no single category clearly standing above the others. The top two categories for the question concerning class activities that were not useful really did not address any specific activity (see Table XX). Highest ranked answer with 33% of the responses was "nothing special". Some students qualified their answers by saying, for example, in some cases, they felt whole English classes they had been required to take had been a waste of time. One-third of the responses, however, showed that students could not remember any daily classroom activities that had been less useful. Widely varying "miscellaneous" answers made up the next largest category with 28% of the responses. Third with 22% were answers that

mentioned how time was wasted for individuals when class time was spent covering things students already knew.

TABLE XX

LESS USEFUL ENGLISH CLASS ACTIVITIES

Nothing	33
Miscellaneous	28
Working on stuff that I already knew	22
Doing stuff that we could do outside of class	10
Talking to other foreigners	7

Figures are percentages n=60 responses

Responses to the question concerning the use of English in regular KU classes (see Table XXI) indicated that students mentioned all the skills, but writing ranked highest with 39% of the total responses followed by reading with 31%, speaking with 18%, and listening with 10%.

TABLE XXI

ENGLISH USE IN ACADEMIC COURSEWORK

Writing	39
Reading	31
Speaking	18
Listening	10
Miscellaneous	2
Figures are percentages	n=88 responses

Table XXII shows that students also felt writing continued to be the English skill most difficult for them (36%). Speaking during class discussions, asking questions, and giving class presentations all formed the second most difficult category with 22% of the students' responses.

TABLE XXII

ENGLISH DIFFICULTIES IN ACADEMIC COURSEWORK

Writing	36
Speaking in class, presentations	22
Understanding new vocabulary	10
Taking notes	9
Miscellaneous	7
Understanding teacher, other students	6
Figures are percentages	n=69 responses

Concerning skills that were easy for the students (see Table XXIII), 30% of their responses referred to being able to easily understand the teacher and the other students in a class. Students said they might not understand a chemistry lecture, for example, but they felt it was because of the difficulty of the actual subject matter, not because of any English deficiency on their part. Reading, with 23% of the responses, was the second-easiest skill followed by speaking and the response that nothing was easy, both with 13% of the responses.

TABLE XXIII

EASIEST ENGLISH TASKS IN ACADEMIC COURSEWORK

Understanding teacher, other students	30
Reading	23
Nothing	13
Speaking	13
Writing	10
Using grammar	9

Figures are percentages n=70 responses

An overwhelming majority (90%) of the students said that they could remember a teacher from their English program who had helped them learn the most (see Table XIV). The 10% who said "no" felt they had learned English mostly from their own personal study; teachers from their English program had not helped in particular.

TABLE XIV

ENGLISH TEACHERS A

Question: Did you have a teacher in your English program who helped you learn the most?	
yes	90
no	10
Figures are percentages	n=61 responses

TABLE XV

ENGLISH TEACHERS B

Question: If so, what did that teacher do to help you learn?	
Cared, approachable, fun, eager, relaxed, personable	54
Corrected my papers, helped me with my mistakes	32
Used the things we learned	9
Knowledge of English and different languages	5
Figures are percentages	n=79 responses

Most of the answers to how a particular teacher had helped a student learn the most could be easily put into two main categories (see Table XV). The category with over half of the responses (54%) described an English teacher who cared about her students, who was approachable and easy to talk to, who enjoyed teaching, who

was interested in her students' progress and actively encouraged them, and who seemed to understand foreign students and their situations. In short, students were talking about the affective domain and about teachers who had successfully lowered the affective filter in their classrooms. The second highest category of responses described a teacher who gave lots of individual correction and feedback on students' progress. "She correct my mistake," as one student put it.

Discussion of Results

A close comparison of this study with the similar Christison and Krahnke study (1986) cannot provide totally accurate explanations for any major differences in the two studies' results. This is because not much is known about the 12 different intensive English programs from which the students in the Christison and Krahnke study (C. & K. study) had graduated, aside from the fact all 12 programs were intensive in nature and were located in 12 different states from all parts of the United States. Also nothing is known about the English policies of the universities in which the students in the C. & K. study were currently enrolled. Much, however, is known about KU's English policies and the English program students in this study had completed, so comparisons based on this information can be useful.

The results presented in Table XI correspond quite closely with those of the C. & K. study. Students in this study felt less positive about their English skills improving as a result of their English program at KU. (80% "yes" responses compared to C. & K.'s 97% "yes" responses.) This may be because students in this study had been in the U.S. longer and had studied English longer (at least on a part-time basis) than the students in the C. & K. study who were only describing their full-time English study. It is quite likely as KU students are allowed to take KU courses part-time in addition to remaining required English courses, they will feel that their English courses play a smaller role in the improvement of their English skills.

It is interesting to note KU students felt more contact with native speakers, TV, and radio could have helped them improve faster, just as in the C. & K. study. In the case of students who had improved quickly, contact with native speakers in dormitories, at parties, in conversation groups, etc., ranked as important reasons improvement had come so quickly. These students' feelings have been substantiated by St. Martin's research (1980) where intensive English students in homestay programs made significantly more improvement in TOEFL scores and English class grades than students who were not in homestay programs (and therefore had less contact with native speakers).

Students in this study differed greatly from those in the C. & K. study in one aspect of desired English program changes (see Table XIII). Former English students at KU ranked speaking/understanding as the class they would have most liked to have dropped (41% of the responses) while students in the C. & K. study ranked speaking class (70% of the responses) as the one they would have most liked to have added. Again, this might be true because overall, the students in this study had been in the U.S. longer and had studied English at KU longer (at least on a part-time basis) than those in the C. & K. study.

One-third of the responses (33%) in the desired program changes presented in Table XIV dealt with proficiency exam-related changes. Not surprisingly, this indicates the importance students place on a proficiency exam in a program such as the AEC's where students must meet relatively high exit-level criteria equivalent to a 570 TOEFL score (ETS, 1987, p. 19). Answers to this question were more varied than to those of any other open-ended question in the interview. Numerous single responses under the large "miscellaneous" category ranged from "the teachers should use the blackboard more often," to "we need more social activities." This proves how difficult it is for an intensive English program to be all things to all people. It also agrees with what other researchers (Bulthius, 1986; Cadieux & Wehrly, 1986; Carter

& Sedlacek, 1986) have pointed out; foreign students themselves are a very diverse group and as Brislin and Pederson state (1976), the only predictable characteristics of foreign students are they are "foreign" and "here temporarily to study" (p. 134). A positive point in the desired program changes shown in Table XIV is one-fourth (26%) of the responses showed no changes in the English program were desired except for the classes discussed in earlier questions to be possibly added or dropped. This indicates at least some program satisfaction.

Christison and Krahnke reported that "most" subjects (in their study) felt that intensive ESL programs provided a good general preparation for academic work, but the majority did not seem to think "instruction in specific skills...addressed their later needs" (1986, p. 72). Students in this study made no such distinction, but as reported in Table XV, 61% felt their English program had helped prepare them for their regular KU classes. Although there were no statistically significant differences in the response based on how long ago students had proved proficiency, it is interesting to note that only 48% of the recent AEC graduates said "yes" to whether their English program had prepared them for KU study. This is a difference of 24% when compared with the 72% "yes" response rate of students who had been full-time regular KU students for over a year. This could have been because recent AEC graduates were still struggling to cope with the demands of full-time academic study and consequently felt less prepared. Recent AEC graduates also might not have been able to judge how much of their English ability was due to study at the AEC. Over one-fourth of the students (28%) at some point or another in the interview specifically mentioned how they were at a disadvantage when compared to Americans. This was rather an unfair comparison they were making of themselves in light of research which shows us younger immigrant students need from five to seven years to reach grade-level norms in second language academic skills (Cummins, 1983). Virtually all the students

interviewed talked about experiencing difficulties in their first academic classes; the main factor that seemed to determine their answer to the question in Table XV was how responsible they held their English program for preparing them for regular academic classes. Other students, like the following French student, felt initial difficulties were inevitable, and impossible to totally prepare for:

> I had to jump. I had to do it. You know, I could have stayed [in English classes] one more semester, but I don't think, I'm sure it, I mean if they give me such a choice, no I'm not ready, but yeah, you're never ready for it.

An Indonesian student agreed: "...this is the best they [AEC] can do...I know that my English wasn't that good at that time when I left so what I mean is that there's nothing more I could learn at the AEC."

The findings in Table XVI reported that a large majority (72%) of the students in this study had good feelings about their English program as opposed to "almost all" the students in the C. & K. study (1986, p. 72). Although there were no statistically significant differences, students who had studied only one or two terms at the AEC answered "yes" 80% of the time as opposed to 68% "yes" responses from students who had studied at the AEC more than two terms, a difference of 12%. All the students in this study were pursuing degrees and required English study was only a prerequisite for their ultimate objective--regular academic classes. It seems logical, then, that students who had had fewer required English courses would have more positive feelings about their English study. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, some students reported changes in their feelings over time. For example, one Malaysian student said:

> I had a, well, when I first got here, I had a bad feeling about that, but simply because everybody has to study English, anywhere and there's no credit hours on the courses, but later on it seems that the courses really helped me.

Another student from Columbia responded just the opposite: "Yeah, well let's see at the beginning I learned a lot, but then I start, you know, like staying in the same level and get frustrated. I didn't improve or anything..." Other students who reported bad feelings about their English program sometimes made distinctions about what they considered the program as this Saudi Arabian student did: "I had good feelings about my teachers...I mean the teachers were very nice, but it's out of their hand.... I would say I don't feel that the program was very good." A Korean student echoed the Arabic speaker's sentiments: "I have a really good feelings about certain instructors because they are really willing to help me a lot. As I told you, I don't like the system."

The findings reported in Table XVII reveal that the only significant differences between students were based on their length of study. Those who had studied longer at the AEC differed significantly from those who had studied a shorter time in their attitudes about the length of their study. Students who had studied a shorter time were more likely to have been satisfied with the length of their study; students who had studied a longer time were more likely to have felt the length of their English study should have been shorter. Lewkowicz and Moon (1985, p. 5) tell us that high level students tend to accurately evaluate their skills; intermediate level or plateaued students tend to overestimate their abilities. These "high level students" would most likely correspond to the group spending only one or two terms at the AEC. "Intermediate students" might describe the students in the group who had studied at the AEC more than two terms. Perhaps this is one way to explain the difference in perceptions. Whatever their personal experience, many students felt the same way as this Malaysian student about the best length for an English program:

> ...at first I didn't like that but at the end I liked that because I have some good points about the program, and I have some bad points about the program because I heard a lot of my friends say bad point never say good about that .... I personally say that this program is good for one or two semesters.

Not all students felt their program should have been shorter however. One Arabic student spoke for several students with these remarks: "Oh gosh, I guess my learning English did not finish, finish from the AEC. I would like to study more but the problem is, as a foreigner, there is money and time."

The skill area preferences for this study listed in Table XVIII are more specific than those in the C. & K. study because students in this study were all talking about the same program. This is probably also why "miscellaneous" was a more prominent category in the C. & K. study. Reading fared considerably worse in this study than in the C. & K. study; it was ranked first as the least interesting class and was not even mentioned once in the results for most interesting class. In contrast, reading ranked as the second most interesting class in the C. & K. study and did not appear in the least interesting class categories. One possible reason for reading's poor showing in this study was the students' perceptions of reading as revealed by their remarks. One-third of the students specifically linked reading with vocabulary in their answers, so much so that some even referred to reading class as vocabulary class. Although reading classes aim to teach reading skills, it seems that students were only focusing on reading as the study of words.

As illustrated by the findings in Table XIX, answers to the questions concerning useful class activities varied greatly. As mentioned previously, the interactive "special" aspects of the ESL classroom were appreciated by many students such as this Saudi Arabian graduate student:

> In class? Trying to, I mean speak loudly and to communicate with the teacher, all of them, sometimes I was in classes where most of the students

> were much younger than I was so I do not hesitate, I found it a chance for me and I forget my background. I forgot my career. I forget that I sit down right here...between these kids learning English!

A Venezulean student responded:

> We used to talk among ourselves. That was very interesting because in the class there were people from Arab countries and South America and European, and a lot of us had different accents and it was funny trying to understand each other and trying to speak one language and not all of ours.

It's interesting to note that although speaking class was ranked as the class most students would have dropped from their programs, speaking activities were what students felt were most useful to them in their classes.

No single response was mentioned often as a waste of class time (see Table XX). "Nothing special" and "miscellaneous" responses made up a majority of the total responses. This seems ironic because concern about time was a common theme that ran through virtually all of the interviews, even apart from this specific question. Time concerns mentioned included pressure from families to quickly finish English (and academic) study, AEC classes as a waste of time, lack of time to study, etc. This is not peculiar to KU. Pankowski and Maurice (1986, p. 14) also tell us in general, foreign students are "overly concerned with getting out of intensive English programs as quickly as possible, passing the TOEFL, and getting into the university to study what they came to study in the first place." One might point to the low number of responses (60) to the question about class time and conclude that students simply could not remember specific activities that were not useful to them. Students had no trouble giving 93 responses to the question about useful class activities, however, so this does not seem to be an adequate explanation. Suffice it to say at the classroom level AEC teachers have not been making many mistakes in utilizing every classroom minute, at least mistakes students can easily identify and

utilizing every classroom minute, at least mistakes students can easily identify and describe.

Responses to the questions about the students' use of English in their academic classes (see Table XXI) varied greatly from the responses of students in the C. & K. study. In answering the question about which skills students used most in their regular KU classes, students in this study ranked writing the highest with 39% and listening the lowest with 10%. Students in the C. & K. study did just the opposite, ranking listening the highest with 50% of the responses and writing the lowest with 10%. One major difference between these two studies' populations may explain these rankings. KU students who were interviewed had all been through an intensive English program, but 84% had also been required to take additional part-time English courses until they had passed all parts of the AEC proficiency test. They were being interviewed about their total (full-time and part-time) English program. Although students in the C. & K. study may have studied English part-time at their universities (some of which were different universities from their English programs), they were only being interviewed about the intensive English program they had completed. For AEC students, "writing is the major obstacle to passing the proficiency exam" (University of Kansas, 1983, p. 29) so writing may be the English skill they most likely view as "English." It seems from the responses that "English" as perceived by the students is something one studies at the AEC, hence the higher percentage of "writing" responses. One Korean student went so far as to say, "Because my major is electrical engineering I don't use English a lot."

As shown in Table XXII, writing ranked as the most difficult skill for KU students in their academic classes (36%) while it was not even mentioned often enough in the C. & K. study to merit its own category (under 5%). Again, the comparative difficulty many AEC students have in passing the writing portion of the proficiency test may make them more aware of their weaknesses in this skill.

(Writing was also ranked as the most difficult English class.) The second most difficult category of things done in English for academic classes consisted of communications skills, such as speaking in class and giving presentations. Elizabeth Soppelsa, present director of the AEC, has said in an article in the KU student newspaper ("AEC Director", 1981) students without good communications skills were at an unfair disadvantage because they could not participate in classroom discussion which affected their grades. The students in this study who felt communications skills were most difficult for them would agree with this. Architecture and art / design majors mentioned how important it was for them to communicate their ideas well when they were presenting their designs in class. Engineering majors also mentioned about having to often work with their classmates on projects. A Lebanese student described his strategies for dealing with communication problems in this way:

> ...You ask a question, you're afraid the teacher will not understand you, say 'what?' and I hate that! I can't say anything more. Just forget it. Sometimes you don't ask so many questions, just go to his office. You will do much better...If you are in the class, if you are sitting in the back, you have to yell, so you don't ask. Mostly you just go to his office, but if you are sitting in the front, you can ask him.

Results of the questions concerning the easiest skills for students in their academic classes (see Table XXIII) were quite similar in both this study and the C. & K. study. The response "nothing" was given 13% of the time by KU students as compared to 29% by students in the C. & K. study. KU's previously mentioned high exit-level criteria and the fact that students in this study had lived in the U.S. and studied English longer than the students in the C. & K. study might be two reasons why fewer KU students felt "nothing is easy."

The answers concerning English teachers (see Tables XIV and XV) reveal they played an important part in students' English learning; in some cases, teachers provided the only bright spot in an otherwise "bad memories" or "bad feelings" kind of experience. Changing the wording of the question from "favorite teacher" to "teacher who helped you learn the most" reduced the number of teacher personality characteristics mentioned; 54% in this study as compared to "almost universally mentioned" (1986, p. 71) in the C. & K. study. The fact, however, that students in this study who mentioned personality factors were describing teachers who had helped them learn tells us that teachers being "fun" and "relaxed" and "heartful" (as one student put it) also has much to do with helping students learn English. One Malaysian student described his teacher in this way: "...when I had a problem, I went to talk to him and then he just encouraged me not to give up. Keep going you know. So I mean he let me feel that I could do it." A student from Iran felt personality factors were the extra things that make a good teacher:

> She wasn't just a regular teacher, just coming and start teaching. She used to do a lot of fun things in the class. She used to joke with the students, she used to laugh with them, she used to give advice to them. All of those things, they make a good teacher, and I guess she is a good teacher right now.

Teachers who gave students feedback were also appreciated by students. This was the second-highest ranked category of best teacher characteristics. This Arabic student combined both of the two major categories when describing his best teacher:

> ...whenever I had mistakes or something like this he always used to correct me, even when I was speaking to him, he would stop me and correct me. He was so helpful to me. I liked that teacher a lot. He was very good teacher.

Another student from Costa Rica did the same thing when he described several of his best teachers: "They have a special relation like with all the students they were like friends and they help you a lot. They were always telling you your mistakes."

Often during the interviews students wanted to describe their bad teachers as well as their good teachers. Although knowledge of subject matter accounted for only 5% of the responses describing best teachers, lack of knowledge of subject matter was mentioned most often as a weakness of bad teachers. It seems that students viewed this quality not as unimportant but rather as an expected "given" of all good teachers and not something that made a teacher special.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Problem

Over half of the foreign students enrolled at KU have taken or are taking AEC couses, either on a full-time or part-time basis, yet there is no documented information about past students' opinions of their language study once they have proved proficiency and are full-time academic students. Several research studies have been done at KU that have dealt with AEC students or foreign students, but none of them actually identified former AEC students for the purpose of surveying their opinions about their past English study at KU. Former AEC students have voiced complaints about their past English study in the KU newspaper. The only other feedback has been scattered hearsay from former students. The objective of this study was to formally gather information about past English study from a random sample of former AEC students. This information was used to determine what perceptions students had about their past English study and whether these perceptions differed with respect to the length of required AEC study or the length of time since proving proficiency.

The Procedure

Sixty-one former full-time AEC students who had proved English proficiency at KU during the period since 1983 were randomly selected and personally interviewed using a survey form with 25 open-ended questions. The questionnaire was adapted from one used in a previous study of former English

students from 12 different intensive English programs. (Christison & Krahnke, 1986). Questions dealt with general program satisfaction , specific skill area classes, general class activities, effective English teachers, and the students' present use of English in their regular academic classes. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed for content analysis. The frequency and strength of each response as well as multiple responses from each subject were noted. Responses were then categorized and expressed in terms of percentages of the total number of responses for each question. Comparisons were drawn on four questions dealing with general program satisfaction between groups based on length of time spent in required study at the AEC and length of time since proving proficiency.

Results and Conclusions

Because of the previously-mentioned limitations of this study, conclusions should be carefully drawn from the results of this survey. The wide range of answers to the open-ended interview questions made tabulation of the results difficult. Similar responses to questions, however, were especially powerful because students were not presented with alternative choices, as in questionnaire surveys. The following overall conclusions are made from the numerical results of the study as well as from interpretations and points made by students during the interviews.

First, a majority of the students were satisfied with their English programs. In general the students seemed to be saying that the AEC did a good job of preparing them for their academic classes. "They're really serious about it," as one Lebanese student put it. Length of time spent in the AEC or length of time in KU classes since proving proficiency had no significant effect on how students answered questions about their general satisfaction with their English program. The only exception was that students who had studied longer at the AEC were significantly less satisfied with the length of their AEC study. Although it was a rare student who had positive

things to say about everything during the interview, in general, the results of this survey seemed to indicate that students like the ones in past University Daily Kansan articles ("AEC Director," 1981; Crabtree, 1984; Mueller, 1983; Sexton, 1984) who made blanket indictments of the AEC program are a vocal minority and not a reflection of an overall majority view.

Second, as in a past similar study (Christison & Krahnke, 1986), students seemed to feel communicative activities were valuable. Contact with native speakers was seen as useful, both in and out of the classroom and "just talking" ranked high on the list of useful class activities. The informal conversation groups led by native speakers which the AEC organizes every semester were mentioned several times as being useful, and a communications-type class ranked second as a class students would have added to their English program. Although speaking/understanding class was the class students would have most often dropped from their English programs, this was mainly because students felt they could get more communicative practice outside of class, not because students did not see the value of interactive activities.

Third, although this study's results were generally quite similar to those of the C. & K. study, they differed greatly on several points. Students at KU perceived writing as a greater weakness and listening as a greater strength than the students in the C. & K. study. Students at KU also had slightly less program satisfaction than students in the C. & K. study. Two possible reasons for these differences may be the AEC's high exit-level criteria and the relatively longer time students in this study had spent in the U.S. and in studying English at KU.

Fourth, an overall theme in many of the students' answers in this study was the value of individualization. Giving lots of correction and feedback to the students was mentioned second most often as a characteristic of an effective teacher. The special individualized writing class offered to the highest advanced level AEC

students (Writing 054) was specifically mentioned as being especially useful by 13% of the students during their interview, mainly because of the individualized feedback it offered. Students also felt English classes specific to their academic level and discipline would be useful. Any changes that tailored course content more to students' individual needs and interests were seen as useful.

Fifth, the importance of teacher personality characteristics was made clear in this study of what made an effective teacher as well as in the Christison and Krahnke study (1986) of what made a favorite teacher. As previously mentioned, students saw the value of interactive classrooms; effective teachers were the ones who broke down what Krashen calls the affective filter (1981) and facilitated classroom interaction in a comfortable atmosphere. Students' responses also stressed the importance of teachers in general. The teacher was often what made an English class "most interesting" or "least interesting." Several students even said "It all depends on the teacher."

Sixth, a continuing theme throughout the interviews was one of time pressure. Pankowski & Maurice (1986) describe intensive English centers as "pressure cookers" and students' responses in this survey reflected this feeling, even when talking about regular academic classes. Professionals who teach in intensive English programs like KU's must continue to remind themselves that English students are in a mastery learning type of situation, trying to achieve a minimum standard of proficiency as soon as possible. This is unlike typical academic courses where students write papers, pass tests, and put in a semester's worth of class time for course credit. English students are concerned (perhaps overly so) about time. They will appreciate effective use of class time, individualization, and any other aspects of their ESL program that will help them progress more quickly and master English more efficiently.

Recommendations

Change comes slowly in any successful institution like KU's Applied English Center and rightfully so. Changes should be made only after careful deliberation and extensive research. The general positive responses from the former AEC students in this survey seem to indicate that big changes in the program are not really necessary. The following recommendations therefore, present general trends for suggested changes, not drastic variations in the present AEC program.

First, anything that facilitates interaction with native speakers such as the conversation groups mentioned previously should remain in the AEC program, and more of it should be encouraged. Students also realize the value of classroom interaction with each other. Natural communicative activities should continue to be a priority in overall curriculum development and in individual daily lesson plans, even in very academically oriented classes such as advanced writing.

Second, because students saw individualization as being valuable and because the AEC's individualized writing course (054) was specifically mentioned several times as being useful, perhaps more advanced courses in writing, structure, or reading could be organized in this way. Several students even remembered their 054 writing teacher as being their most effective teacher, even though this class does not have daily meetings. This seems to show that given an appropriate curriculum, 15 or 20 minutes in a weekly conference with a teacher can be just as useful to an advanced English student as a 50 minute daily class with a teacher and 14 other students.

Third, AEC reading classes seemed to make a rather poor showing in this survey both in comparison to other AEC skill area classes and to the results of the Christison & Krahnke study (1986). This suggests a close look at the AEC reading curriculum might be advised. Perhaps cues could be taken from the first two

recommendations to make the reading curriculum more individualized and classroom reading activities more interactive.

Background research for this study showed very little is known about how students feel about their past English study, both at KU and at other higher education institutions. A final recommendation would be to continue gathering this kind of information from former AEC students at KU, perhaps in the form of an exit questionnaire to new "graduates" of the AEC. This could be much like the one now given to graduate students in KU's School of Education when they have completed their degree requirements. Information could also be gathered in the form of exit interviews from a random sample of each semester's AEC "graduates." Students have valuable things to say about their past English study, and surveys of their ideas and opinions should be an integral part of any intensive English program's self-evaluation and curriculum development processes.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW REQUEST LETTER

December 2, 1987

Name of Interviewee
Address
Address

Dear _____ :

I am a graduate student in education, specifically in teaching English as a second language, at KU. For my master's degree research, I am planning to interview KU students who were formerly full-time students at KU's Applied English Center. I am interested in your ideas and opinions about your past English study.

Would it be possible for me to arrange a thirty-minute interview with you? I would greatly appreciate your time and trouble. I will be calling you soon to ask your permission for an interview, and if you agree, we can arrange a time and place that is convenient for you. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Barbara Gottschalk
Graduate Student, School of Education
1800 Engel Rd, #924
Lawrence, KS 66045

Dr. George Hughes, Advisor
School of Education

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

The School of Education supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided so that you can decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate you are free to withdraw at any time.

This study is investigating the opinions and attitudes of former full-time English students concerning their English study at Kansas University's Applied English Center. You will be asked to answer some questions about your English program in an oral interview. You will use "I" for yourself and you will change names in your answers so that anonymity can be preserved. The interview will be tape-recorded and transcribed later for analysis by the investigator.

No compensation for physical injury that may result from this research is available. Your participation is requested, but strictly voluntary. Do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study. Be assured that your name will not be associated in any way with the research findings. I appreciate your cooperation very much.

Sincerely,

Barbara Gottschalk
Principal Investigator
Phone: 864-6440

Signature of subject agreeing to participate
A copy of this consent form is available upon request.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Student #_____ Native Language _____

Sex: M ___ F ___ Graduate _____ Undergraduate _____

Major _____ Time in U. S. _____

Program Concerns

1. Do you feel that your English skills improved as a result of your English study at KU?
2. How could you have improved faster?
3. If you could have dropped a class from your English program, what would you have dropped?
4. If you could have added a class to your English program, what would you have added?
5. Would you have made any other changes in your program of English study?
6. Do you feel your English program helped you meet your academic needs for full-time study at KU?
7. Do you have good feelings about your English program?
8. Would you have studied English longer or for a shorter time, or was the length of your study about right?

English Classes and Language Skill Areas

1. Which was your most difficult English class? Why?
2. Which was your easiest class? Why?
3. Which was your most interesting class? Why?
4. Which was your least interesting class? Why?
5. What kinds of things did you do in English class that helped you improve?
6. What things did you do in English class that were a waste of time?

Academic Classes

1. In what ways do you use English the most for your academic course work?
2. What are the most difficult things for you to do in English in your academic classes?
3. What are the easiest things for you to do in English in your academic classes?

Language Teachers

1. Did you have a teacher in your English program who helped you learn the most?
2. If so, what did that teacher do to help you learn?

END

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Date Filmed

March 29, 1991